

Aftershock

by BlazingLegend

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Summary: Some things will span over time, days and months and years, even decades. This just happened to be one of those things. /eleven years after graduation. ash x emma.

1. Chapter 1

This is just a oneshot that spiralled out of control (the best kind) and so it's going to be updated in bursts. I'll tie it up by Monday, definitely. Since it was only s'posed to be a oneshot, the ending comes kind of quick. And it isn't edited. I'm well aware it's probably not my best work, but I'm sleep deprived right now, so just give a girl a break.

* * *

><p>Some things will span over time, days and months and years, even decades. This just happened to be one of those things. eleven years after graduation.

There was a whisper.

He rubbed at his face, rolling around and groaning. "Need sleep..." he murmured, snuggling his head under his pillow.

"Ash, wake up."

There it was again.

He made a sluggish half-pout and swatted at the airâ€"and hit something.

Oh crap, he hadn't meant to do that.

His pillow came swooping for himâ€"and jeez, for something that had

aided man in the fight for comfort for centuries, it sure hurt when being wielded by an angry girlfriend.

"Wake up, you jerk!"

His eyes snapped open, knowing that lest he wanted to be castrated whilst in slumber, he'd better answer her urges. "What, Emma?"

"I want you to wake up."

He threw the covers off, half-hoping they hit her. "It's apparent."

He sat up, leaning himself against the headboard. She was blinking at him, her hands fiddling with her messy golden bedhead "was she selfconscious even in the middle of the night?" and frowning at him.

It was then, even in the darkness, that he noticed the faint shimmer of her eyes.

"Em," he said, opening his arms, pulling her onto the bed with him. She tucked her feet into his lap, pressing her face into his chest. He combed his hands through her hair, smoothing the tangles "but making sure not to hurt her. "Emma, what is it? Tell me. I'm sorry."

She pressed her fingers against his collarbone, making intricate patterns on his skin. "Why are you so mad?"

"I'm not. I'm sorry," he said again. "Zane's rubbing off on me."

At this she turned her face into his shirt and let out a muffled laugh. "True, true..."

He pressed his lips to her hair. "So, are you going to tell me? I could make you some eggs..."

She mumbled, barely audible, "Don't want eggs."

His eyes searched for the clock, but it wasn't in its usual place, atop their shared dresser. His eyes darted to the floor, roving "and soon he found it, upside down and discarded at the foot of her bed.

"Emma..." he whispered. "Why did you throw the clock away?"

She sniffed and wrapped her arms around him, pressing her face into his neck.

"Emma, why?"

She shook her head against him. He wasn't one to push, but she was upset, and if he knew, he could help her "and that couldn't hurt, could it? "Emma."

She shoved away from him, biting her lip "it looked like she had been for a while, all the flesh on her bottom lip was raw. "No. I've changed my mind. I don't want to talk anymore."

She slid off the bed, sniffing, and went out the door, embraced by the honey light of the hallway leaking into the room.

He knew better than to go after her. They'd wind up in a yelling matchâ€”like they _always did_â€”and she'd clam up, storm out, sleep over at Cleo's and not speak to him for the next two weeks.

He sighed, scrounged around for his fallen pillow, and lay back into the covers. But he tossed and turned for a few minutes, then closed his eyes and laughed. There was no chance of further sleep for him, not tonight.

XXX

He drank his orange juice, but ignored the somewhat bitter taste, consumed by figuring out how to look at her without arousing suspicion. He could have been drinking ground lemon rind and he wouldn't have noticed.

She was sitting, deflated, against the couch, fiddling with the sash of her pale blue dressing gown. "Ash," she called out. He put down the glass and crossed over to her, sitting next to her because it was the only sitting place in the room and couldn't be held against him if he used it as an excuse to be near her.

"Yeah?" he said. He knew how he lookedâ€”ruffled hair, sagging eyes. Dry lips.

She, however, was a different story. She looked just as bright as ever, fresh as though she hadn't been up halfâ€”possibly moreâ€”the night. She smiled at him, but it didn't reach her eyes, or any other part of her body, for that matter.

It was a bland smile, the one she put on when she was dealing with an angsty teen at work, or when she was in an uncomfortable situation with her parents. Also the one she used when she was mad at him. "Hey," she said, her eyebrows rising. "You know we're with Alan at eleven, don't you?"

He banged his palm into his forehead. At least _that_ spurred a genuine smile from her. "Oh no, I totally forgot. Sorry."

"We're taking him to his soccer gameâ€”Cleo's going to go out with Rikki and Bella, or, more likely, sleep."

He saw this as a subtle nudgeâ€”and really, in all honesty, he deserved it. "Oh, no," he said, "You go out with the girls. I'll take Alan to his soccer game."

Her eyebrows shot up fast, too fast for her not to be expecting it. "Oh, really? That'd be great. _Thanks_ _sweetie," she leant over and pressed a kiss to cheek.

(And that was how he knew just how mad she was at him. Emma _hated_ _pet names. She always groaned whenever Zane called Rikki anything but her actual name, with the exclusion of "hey you.")

He frowned at her, for a small moment, before breaking into a full-fledged grin. "Sure thing. Do you want me to make you some breakfast?"

"No. No thank you. I'll just go to the room andâ€”do some things. Maybe I'll get out Elliot's old toys for Alan..." and with that last vague thought, she hopped away from him and sped down the hallway.

* * *

><p>Will probably be edited sometime in the faraway future, 'cause I'm too odd-duck to leave it this sucky for a huge period of time.<p>

2. Chapter 2

I'm too lazy to bother with the 'let's draw out the updates like a good author' thing. This is all finished on my computer, and it doesn't matter to me whether or not people review. Bye.

* * *

><p>She pursed her lips, glancing at her watch, sighing, glancing at it again. "Why is she always late?"<p>

"I don't know," he said, shrugging and looking back at his edition of Horseback Riding.

"Why can't they ever just be on time...?" she said, twisting her locket in silence until there was a knock at the door. "Finally," she muttered, bounding toward it and flinging it open.

Cleo stood there, clutching a five-year-old close to her, thick dark locks slipping out of her haggard bun. "Here he is," despite her obvious fatigue, she was beaming, idly tangling her fingers through her son's hair. "I got your text. We get to spend the day together?"

"Yup," Emma said, grinning herself.

"Mum," Alan whined, trying to wriggle out of his mother's iron grip. "I wanna go with Auntie Em."

"Auntie Em's coming with me today, Alan,"

"Lemme go."

Cleo glanced at her young son, her arms tightening around him. "Well..."

Before she could make up her mind about the matter, the little boy ducked out of his mother's hold and ran into the apartment. He called behind him, grin revealing at least one missing tooth, "Auntie Rikki says you have separation anxiety!"

Cleo's eyes flared wide, her mouth dropping open. "Auntie Rikki told you that? That's it, you're not spending the weekend with her and Uncle Zane anymore!"

"But mum..." he said, pouting, "Auntie Rikki says she'llâ€”"

"No buts! Auntie Rikki shouldn't be teaching you things like that!"

Very, very bad..." she muttered. She leant over and hissed in Emma's ear, so her son couldn't hear, "Goddammit, I am going to maim that woman..."

Emma chuckled and rubbed her friend on the shoulder. "It's alright. He probably doesn't even know what it means."

She frowned. "Probably..."

Alan was now sitting, snuggled next to Ash, peering over at the page, roving it with his father's curious blue eyes. "Mummy, I want a horse!" he proclaimed, stabbing a short, ragged-cuticle finger at a particularly beautiful black mare.

"Of course you do, sweetheart..." Cleo muttered, shaking her head, only releasing another tumble of curls. She scrunched her face, leaning over to whisper again, "I love him, but... aren't horses for girls?"

Emma raised an eyebrow. "You have Ash as an uncle, the stereotype tends to change,"

She shrugged.

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Cleo was whinging as Rikki, Bella and Emma dragged her from store to store.

"I feel so bad about leaving my baby..." she stopped suddenly, causing rest of the girlsâ€"all following herâ€"to jar and bang together.

"Come on, Cleo, he's five," Bella said, folding her arms. "You've left him before."

"Does Ash know anything about children?"

"Cleo, sweetie, not to be a downerâ€"" Rikki said, in a syrupy voice. Cleo glared at her. "â€"but this happens every goddamn time. It's been five years. Get over it."

Emma swatted at Rikkiâ€"the girl squealed and duckedâ€"and turned on Cleo with a best-girlfriend-sympathizing-smile. "If it's any consolation," she said, while Cleo was pouting and tugging at a curl, "Ash has two brothers and three sisters. He's great with kids."

"Oh, fine," she said, still frowning.

"Good!" Rikki cheered, then muttered under her breath, "Man, she really does have seperâ€""

Cleo's eyes perked and she spun on Rikki, proclaiming, "That reminds me!" and proceeded to hit her upside the head with a hearty thwack.

"Who did she kill?" Bella said, eyes wide, spying Cleo's wrathful face where there was usually only docile intentions. Rikki grimaced, rubbing the back of her head.

She hit her again. "Don't you go teaching my son bad words!"

"Not to invoke anymore best-friend-bashing," Bella said, raising her hands. "But really, as his mother, shouldn't you be guiding him away from violence?"

Cleo turned on her with balled fists and smouldering features. "He's not here. Just like when Lewis drinks out of the carton when he's at school," she turned her head to the transparent roof of the mall, "That's right, Lewis, I know!"

Bella leant over and whispered to Emma, "I think child-bearing has turned her into a psychopath,"

"Nah," Emma said, shaking her head and shrugging. "That was five years ago. We would have noticed by now."

Bella made an about-face, nodding and making sounds of agreement. "I suppose you're right."

"Aren't I always...?" she said, nudging the other girl, who broke out into a grin.

"Do you have no shame?" she said, shoving her in the shoulder. "Really, you're worse than... well, you're not worse than Rikki. Me. You're worse than me,"

"When you have to elaborate on your point it kind of loses the desired effect..."

"Shut up," she said. But she was smiling.

Emma heard as she tuned back into Rikki and Cleo's conversation, "... so, how has Lewis been?"

She almost scoffed, and Bella shot her a bemused glance. Like Rikki cared about the goings on in Lewis's life, the person she described as 'a testament to all things dorky.' She just didn't want to get whacked again.

"Em," Bella said, smiling, "How's Ash?"

She tensed. "Fine. Why?"

She frowned. "Because ever since you moved in together you bring him up, like, twelve times in a conversation."

"Nothing's wrong, Bella," she almost cringed with the lie. "Everything's fine."

"Em." She said, sharp and demanding attention. "We've been together, for whatâ€"ten years now?"

"Eleven."

Bella nodded. "Yes. Eleven. I'm not an outsider anymore. Someone to be wary of. I'm your friend."

"Yes. You are."

"Then tell me." She said. "For God's sake, Em, a spat is nothing to go nova about. You don't need to hide it," she said, folding her arms. "In fact, if it makes you happy, Will and I had a fight a couple days ago."

She scoffed. "Yeah, about flower arrangements. God, Bella," she said, the hairs rising on her arms. "That's a dream couple's argument."

Bella's hand curled—and Emma noticed, it was her right, the one with her gleaming emerald and opal engagement ring. "Don't be like that," she whispered.

"Like what?"

"Like a _bitch,_" she hissed.

Emma jerked back, and Bella looked at her with dark eyes. "Bella," she said, "I'm not."

She laughed. "Yes, you are," she said, shaking her head.

"I'm not."

Bella's eyes narrowed, stormy blue slits glaring into her. "Maybe today wasn't such a good idea," she leant forward, spitting, "I'm going home. To my _fiancÃe,_"

She watched as she walked away, with tensed shoulders and balled fists.

Emma turned around, tears springing to her eyes. Hadn't they just been joking? Laughing? How could things have turned so bad in the space of three minutes?

Cleo and Rikki had broken out of their conversation, and were both staring, wide-eyed. Rikki spoke first. "What the hell was that?"

She was about to say, "Nothing. It was nothing," but remembered in time that it was those type of words that had sent Bella spiralling. She instead clamped her mouth shut, biting down hard on her lip.

"Emma," Cleo advanced toward her, slowly, with caution. She whispered, "What was that?"

Aware her bottom lip was trembling, she hitched her bag higher on her shoulder and shook her head. "I should go."

Then, leaving a trail of shocked faces and disbelief in her wake, Emma strode away without ever answering them.

3. Chapter 3

Ash jolted forward as Emma slammed the door behind her. She walked up to him, eyes unrelenting and poisonous.

"What? What is it?" he was about to say _who got murdered, _but refrained, knowing he'd get slapped for sure.

"Is Alan here?"

"Why?"

"Is. Alan. _Here?_"

He shook his head, getting out a, "No. He isn't."

"Good," she seethed, "That's good."

"Why? What's wrong? What happened?"

She glared at him. "This is _your _fault," she said, and he heard her voice crack. "This is all your fault!"

"Tell me what _happened,_"

She let out a sob, a hot, fat tear rolling down her cheek. "Bella hates me," she whispered, a far cry from the shouting and yelling. "Bella hates me and it's your fault!"

"How is it my fault?"

"Because you asked about that stupid clock!" she said. He wasn't sure if she was making any sense. "Why would you ask about that, Ash? _Why?_"

He got out the only words that were clear to him. "Because you were upset and I thought"

"Oh, you _thought._" She said, sneering. "You thought, did you?"

"I... yes."

"Well, here's what I _think,_" she said, leaning forward, "I think I'm _gone._"

"Wha... what?"

She stalked away from him and flung open the door. "Good_bye!_"

XXX

He didn't know what was going on. What _was _going on?

She couldn't be gone. She just couldn't be.

All he'd asked her is what was _wrong. _Wasn't that being a good boyfriend? Wasn't that being a good person?

That clock. She'd gone on about that clock. He jumped up from his seat and rushed down the hallway into their shared room. He bounded over to her bed. The covers were ruffled and tossed about, as if writhing away from a demon. He looked around on the floor for their clock, and found it in the same place, upturned and kissing the ground.

He picked it up and turned it around in his hands. There was nothing abnormal about it, not that he'd expected there was. But the question was: why had she thrown it in the first place?

He was scuttling about, pacing, trying to figure everything out, when he saw a gleam of golden on the floor.

He crouched to inspect further, and picked up a ring. A sapphire encircled by two diamonds.

No.

His head shot up, and he saw the burgundy velveteen box lying discarded, ajar, only a few feet away.

No. _She didn't._

He closed his eyes, finally beginning to understand.

XXX

Bella dropped her keys, eyes searching around. "Will? You here?"

There was no answer, and she went over to the couch and picked up the book she'd been reading that morning. He was probably at work.

Her phone chirped with a new text before she could get too far in, and she sighed and reached for it. It was from Rikki. _U know where Em is? Ash doesnt, and Cleos freaking out._

Wait. Emma was missing?

She texted back. _No. She missing?_

Cleo think so. I don't. Ash says they had a fight. Maybe she ran off.

Maybe.

U want me to help luk?

No. We fine here. Will call if anything happens.

She bit down on her lip. _Kay. _She couldn't go back to her book now, she was too turned around and unsettled.

So she sat, hands fidgeting in her lap, until the knock came.

It made her startle, breathing hard. But she shouldn't be freaking out like this. It wasn't like Emma had _vanished. _She probably just decided to go have a swim after a fight. God knows Bella had done that enough times.

She got up to answer the door.

Emma was standing there, tears rolling down her cheeks. Her hair was ruffled, sticking out in places. She looked like she'd been crying for a while. "Bella," she whispered. "I'm sorry."

Bella's eyes widened and she gathered Emma in her arms, bringing her inside. "Emma. What happened?" she asked while she texted Rikki, _Emma fine. Shes with me. Shes pretty upset._

"I left Ash," she said, staring into the grain of Bella's coffee table. "At least, I think I did."

"What do you mean, you think?"

She raised her hands to her face, letting out a sob. "Iâ€"I don't know. _I just left."

Bella bit down on her lipâ€"she was supposed to remain angry for what had happened earlier, but now, seeing Emma's body wracked with silent tears, she couldn't bring herself to be. She opened her arms and brought her into a tight embrace.

"Shh," she murmured, stroking her light blonde hair, "It's alright. It's alright."

"No, it's not," she said, shaking her head. "It's not alright."

"Of course it is."

"No. You're wrong. It's all _gone,_" she said. "You and Will are engaged, Cleo and Lewis have had a _child _together..."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

She broke off from the warm hold, but Bella remained holding her hand. She wiped at her face.

"Emma, what does that have to do with anything?"

She swallowed, hiccupping, "He was going to propose."

Bella jerked back in shock. Ash was going to _propose? _As in marriage? She hadn't known. _None _of them had known. Lewis had talked with them before popping the questionâ€"and Will said he had, too. But instead of releasing these swirling thoughts on the already burdened Emma, she simply said, "I didn't know."

"I found the ring in his coat," she whispered. "God, Bella, it just _fell out._"

Ignoring the somewhat clichÃ©, Bella shook her head, saying, "But that's alright, isn't it? Don't you love each other?"

"That's the thing," she said. "I don't know. I don't know if we love each other. I mean, I thought we did..." she stopped.

"But...?"

Her sad, blue eyes reflected into Bella's own. "But, we just moved in together. And I freaked out about that, too," she said.

Bella remembered. She had been a mess and started asking questions that didn't make any sense, running around like it was the end of the world.

"How can he think we're ready for marriage?"

"I'm not sure," she replied, sighing. "Emma, honey."

"I just don't..." Emma said, and then she paused, looking up at Bella's face. "Can I crash here for a little bit?"

Bella nodded. "Sure. Of course. Of course."

There was a huge bang from _somewhere, _and Bella wondered vaguely whether Rikki made good on her promise to electrocute Zane.

"What the hell?" Emma said, her head whipping up, bright blue eyes startled out of tears.

Bella shook her head. "Not sureâ€"

"Bella! Open up. I know Emma's in there. I need to talk to her. Please."

Bella sighed. "I'll go talk to him," she said. "You stay here."

Emma nodded. "I'm going to go to the bathroom. I'm a mess..." her voice trails off as she heads away from the living room and into the hallway, and Bella knew it wasn't a point of pride or anything of the sort, she just didn't want to hear her (possibly ex) boyfriend's voice.

Bella walked up to the door and ran a hand through her hair. "Hey, Ash."

"I need to talk to her."

_He _looked like it was the end of the world.

"I'm not going to lie," Bella said, because she wasn't. "She's not in a good place right now, and I'm pretty sure she doesn't want to talk to you."

"Please."

Bella flashed him a sad, slow smile, and then shut the door in his face.

* * *

><p>Next chapter is the epilogue. Told you, this was just a oneshot on crack.<p>

4. Epilogue

****TWO MONTHS LATER****

Emma has moved out of Bella and Will's a week and a half ago. She didn't stay for long, but it was still longer than she intended.

When Ash finally tracks her down, it's four months since she's seen him, four months since he was at Bella's door and she was trying _so

goddamn hard _to ignore it.

It's in the wintertime, and Cleo and Lewis have announced another pregnancy. Bella and Will are waiting for the summer to get married, and Rikki and Zane are fighting, because they've just gotten engaged, and Rikki wants to keep her name.

They will eventually settle on _Rikki Chadwick-Bennett,_ but none of this has happened yet.

Emma is in her favourite coffee place, ordering a hazelnut cappuccino, wearing her _who gives a crap what the world thinks _clothes, and that's when he walks in.

Her eyes are bright and almost laughing, and they widen as she looks at him. "Ash?" she says. She nods at him, brings her drink to her lips. "I thought you'd moved out of town."

Her hair is curling around her face, falling out of a bun that must have been only half-crafted to begin with. She's wearing glasses now, blue ones, and they go so well with her eyes.

"I did." He says. "But I'm back now."

She smiles, and it's beautiful. "I can see that. Where'd you go?"

"New Zealand."

She nods. "Ah. Never been there. Always wanted to."

He knows. "How have you been, Emma?"

She pulls her hair behind her ear. "I've been good. Thanks."

He steps closer. "Maybe we should talk."

A delicate, blonde eyebrow raises. "About what?"

"About us."

She laughs, and he isn't sure what that means. "We've talked all we can about _us, _Ash."

"I don't think we have."

She shakes her head, sighs. "It really was great to see you."

His cue to leave. He is determined not to take it. "Have you ever thought about us getting back together?"

"No."

"Would you?"

She doesn't say anything else. She just tilts her head, smiles at him, kisses his cheek and then leaves.

He doesn't see her for another year, at least.

****FIVE YEARS LATER****

She must be thirty-four, now.

It was strange, the things that had passed, all the twisted directions and broken roads that had led them here.

But here they were.

He watches his best man, Lewis McCartney, who has taken a break from pep-talking him to run down the aisle and stop his daughter from being too curious about the pretty roses. The pretty roses whose thorns had not been cut.

"Olivia," Lewis cries, pulling her hands away. Then he shouts out, "Cleo, where's Alan?"

"He's with me," a faint, female voice calls back. "Rikki's gonna take him outside. Where's Liddy?"

"With me! Could you come grab her, please?"

"I'm kind ofâ€" "

"_Rikki Chadwick-Bennett, for the love of all things blasphemous, get your butt out here right now!_"

Rikki comes running. "I'm sorry, Lewis," she says. "I know I said I'd take care of the kids for you and Cleoâ€" "

"You did and you will."

"Butâ€" "

"No! "

And that's the end of that conversation.

Ash checks his watch as Lewis saunters over to him once more. "Don't do that. The wedding hasn't even started yet."

And so he stops, and waits for another half hour, for when the music is filling the church with light and warm feelings. It's not traditional music, noâ€" _Emma's nose wrinkled. "Nah. It sounds like we're approaching doom. We don't want that." _

So they didn't have traditional music.

His eyes are fixed on the bottom of the aisle, and he fiddles with his cuffs as he waits for her to appear.

XXX

They've been waiting twenty minutes, the music has stopped, and Emma isn't there yet.

Cleo runs up to him, her hair exploding out of her professionally done hairstyle, her face flushed and her voice cracking. "We've checked every room. She's not there."

Ash feels like he's falling overâ€”no, not just falling over, but like he's being sucked into a wormhole and being split in the head with a two-by-four, all at the same time.

"She's gone. I'm sorry."

She's gone. I'm sorry. She's gone. I'm sorry. She's gone. I'm sorry.

She's gone.

And it's strange how all he can think about is those four words and the fact the Cleo wears the same perfume as Emma does. Jasmine, with a hint of lavender.

"I'm so sorry."

He doesn't hear the words.

Because she is gone, and even though he had been through so muchâ€”they had been through so much, even though he had found her, loved her, lost her. Found her again, lost her again.

Because he knows that this time, he isn't going to find her again.

XXX

It's funny. It's the princes who search, isn't it, and the princesses who wait? He had done both.

But he should have known, because goddammit, he knows Emma, he _knows _her, and he knows that no matter how much of a prince he could be, he would be, for herâ€”

â€”he knows that she never really was going to be the perfect princess.

End
file.